

Human Brain Project review panel recommends reforms

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(Medical Xpress)—A panel created to review the way the European Human Brain Project is being run has released a [summary](#) of their recommendations—in it the panel members suggest that several reforms must be made in order for the project to remain on course.

The Human Brain Project was envisioned by Swiss neuroscientist Henry Markram—he thought that a big team of neuroscientists, [computer scientists](#) and other researchers, if they joined together, could perhaps make inroads towards creating a reasonable model of the human brain. After much discussion a [project](#) was shaped by a team at École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne and given ten years and €1-billion from the European Union to create a model, starting first with a mouse brain. The project, still just a year old, has been marked by bickering amongst scientists working on the project and those attempting to manage the massive endeavor. Last month, in response to criticism and a letter to the European Commission, a decision was made to do away with the three person executive committee that was running the project—henceforth decision making will be made by the 22-member governing board.

In the summary, the panel addresses concerns that researchers' comments or complaints have not been heard by those in charge, and suggests that processes be put in place to allow for airing issues. Last year, hundreds of researchers threatened to boycott the project altogether if changes were not made. The summary does not offer opinions on what steps should be taken to make such changes, however, leaving that to an independent mediation committee that has been set up to address issues. Instead, the authors, who will remain anonymous, offer general opinions regarding the direction the project needs to take if it is to succeed in its goal. But even that is controversial, as several scientists have voiced their opinions that the entire project is a waste of time, money and effort, because we still do not have the technology available to fully understand how the brain works, must less try to model it in all its complexity. The panel merely hints at such a suggestion by noting that workers on the project need to avoid creating unrealistic expectations. The panel authors note that communication among those working on the project also must improve allowing better integration so that everyone will know what is going on.

It has been noted by some that the true overall goal of the project is for it to become an ongoing research effort, similar in esteem to projects such as CERN, the European Space Agency, etc.

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